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Freeing the Prisoners of Boring,
Unproductive Presentations and Training

Part One

The Art and Craft of Presenting

High Performance Communicating

Or "How to Win People and Influence Friends".

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Will they listen to me? Will they like me? Will they believe me? How to grab attention? How to keep people interested? How to cope with nerves? How to make an impact? How to decide what to put in and what to leave out? How to influence people and win them over? How to sell the message? How to provoke follow-through action? How to get beyond survival, towards a standing ovation or at least a positive glow?

The anxiety in these questions is palpable. What a relief it would be to have some answers or perhaps better still, not have to ask the questions in the first place!

These are some of the perennial challenges facing anyone who has ever made a presentation to anybody about anything.

This is the first in a series of articles that will try to provide some answers these questions and give you some specific strategies for overcoming these challenges.



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So, is presenting an art or a craft and what is the difference? Well, I guess the word "art" implies another quite intangible, difficult to define ingredient, talent. Although both art and talent are difficult concepts to describe and discuss, we all tend to have an innate understanding of when they are present, and, perhaps more acutely, when they are not.

Often art and talent will go with stretching or even breaking the rules but making things work anyway. Sometimes talent is linked with that equally elusive concept, charisma, which might be translated as "watch-ability". However we define them, I think there is general acceptance that art, talent and charisma help a presentation. They may not be essential but they certainly add something useful.

So what about craft? If we think about craft as the ability to put things together step by step so that the whole is greater than the sum of its' parts, then it is clear that a presentation might survive on art but it will thrive on craft. It is the craft that will enable people to take specific messages away. The art will help grab and maintain attention and the craft will enable the key messages to be clearly communicated.

Thirty years as an educator, actor, presenter and facilitator, has enabled me to learn a few things about coping with these challenges. Be warned, however, that the challenges will never disappear; there is no miraculous cure-all formula or, as Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd likes to point out quite regularly, "There is no silver bullet." What I **can help you do**, is to turn them into allies instead of obstacles, by enabling you to use the stimulus of these challenges to spur you on to continuous improvement and striving to always do even better next time.

The metaphor of an athlete preparing to run a race should serve us well as a structure for this process. Some readers may wonder about the connection, but make no mistake, presenting, like running, is a **crucial combination of art, craft and intense physical and mental activity**. It is, in short, a **creative energy game** in which the player puts her/his body on the line. This is equally true whether you express yourself in a very overt, extroverted style or in a more reserved way.

Most presentations probably resemble a middle to long-distance race rather than a sprint and occasionally we may have to extend ourselves to a marathon, when running something like a conference or training program that runs for a day or more. If we don't get the energy mix right we may be in danger of burnout or, worse still, dullness.

So we will look at this process into the following segments:



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- **Get organised!** identifying target audience, clarifying outcomes, timescales etc.
- **Get ready!** “race day” warm-up, visualisation, race tactics and strategies.
- **Get set!** what to do just before the gun goes
- **Go!** Opening with a bang and how to deliver your message with a little magic
- **Pacing** managing energy and attention during the presentation
- **Finishing** How to switch on the afterburners so that your message moves on after you finish.
- **Warm-down and stretching.** Making sure there is follow-through on your message and you learn something for the next race.

Before we begin the race, however, let me ask you to reflect on whether you really want to be an athlete presenter? Are you a volunteer or a conscript? Is it something you genuinely value or are you only doing it because you think it is fundamental to “getting ahead” or a basic “job requirement”.

You don’t have to be a brain surgeon to figure out that success is more likely if you are a volunteer who genuinely believes that presenting is an intrinsically valuable skill that, done well, can change people’s lives.

Sure, your initial provocation for improving may just be driven by job requirements and the expectations of others, but try to spend a few minutes reflecting on how you might be able to shift your motivation to a more constructive and ultimately more powerful place.

Reflect on this and then join me in the next issue as we continue the journey.



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